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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ROME 000238

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TAGS: PGOV PREL AF IT

SUBJECT: ITALY'S FAR LEFT, MICE THAT ROAR

REF: A. ROME 0100

1B. ROME 0192

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Classified By: Ambassador Ronald P. Spogli for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

11. (C/NF) SUMMARY: PM Prodi's decision not to oppose the U.S. Army's Dal Molin expansion project has sparked an unusually strong negative reaction, unifying pacifists, communists and no-globalists with a smattering of "not-in-my-backyard" citizens of Vincenza. The government centrists and reformists have a strategy to defuse the situation, but they fear the environment will get worse before it gets better. Another problem triggered by the Dal Molin controversy is that discontented one-issue pacifists are exerting outsized pressure on radical party leaders not to compromise further on security issues critical to our interests (like Afghanistan). As a result, the radical parties could become increasingly intransigent and apply even greater pressure to shift Italian foreign policy further left--further increasing internal tensions inside the center-left. END SUMMARY.

12. (C/NF) PM Prodi's decision not to oppose the U.S. Army's Dal Molin expansion project (REF A) has sparked an unusually strong negative reaction from radical members of PM Prodi's center-left (CL) coalition; resulted in numerous demonstrations; and caused some coalition members to threaten to reject Afghan ISAF mission funding in retaliation (REF B). The reaction has not yet faded after the final decision was announced as is the standard pattern of Italian political debate. With a major anti-Dal Molin demonstration scheduled for February 17, some politicians have told Poloff that the reaction could still be "painful."

13. (C/NF) A member of the Democrats of the Left (DS) Secretariat told Poloff that MoD Parisi's mismanagement of

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Dal Molin has resulted in an unnatural alliance of pacifists/no-global activists/anti-American agitators and "not-in-my-backyard" (NIMBY) citizens from the Vincenza community. He explained that the strategy of reformists/centrists within the government is to break up this alliance and suggested that any effort by the U.S Army to show planning flexibility and attention to local environmental and traffic concerns would help. He continued that the radicals have been particularly adroit at leveraging the support of otherwise center-right (CR) voting local residents to increase their voice and to radicalize the debate. However, local polls do not corroborate the notion that a large number of CR-voters are against the base-expansion and the CR-dominated city council has

consistently voted in favor of the expansion.

AN ANALYSIS OF THE PACIFIST BIAS AMONG FAR LEFT VOTERS

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¶4. (SBU) Prodi's CL coalition comprises three distinct political currents: centrists, reformists, radical leftists. Six of the parties in Prodi's cabinet (Council of Ministers) received less than one million votes in last April's elections compared to nearly 12 million for the DS/Daisy Alliance known as the Olive Tree Coalition (Ulivo). However, because of Prodi's razor thin majority in the Senate, each of these micro-parties could conceivably force a governing crisis/bring an end to the Prodi government.

¶5. (C/NF) In Italy's never-ending campaign season, the three radical left parties constantly compete against one another for votes with the battle often devolving into which party can tack most sharply to the left in an effort to pick up extremist voters, especially pacifists. Communist Renewal (RC) Senator Russo Spena was recently quoted as saying that the pacifists who vote for RC are not interested in the party's successes on the economic front and focus disproportionate attention on issues like Dal Molin, Afghanistan and Iraq. Because even a slight increase in the numerical vote for a party receiving only 2 percent of the national vote is highly significant for such a micro-party, these extreme pacifist voters wield outsized influence within the radical parties. Because each of the radical parties is essential to Prodi staying in power, Italy's relatively small pacifist community yields disproportionate political influence with the government.

¶6. (SBU) Corriere della Sera, Italy's paper of record, reported polling results on January 31 showing that the CL parties, in general, are losing support relative to Forza Italia and the CR coalition. Moreover, it shows that RC, the relative moderate among the radical parties, is losing support to the smaller more radical Italian Communist Party

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(PdCI) and to the Greens. The paper notes Prodi is caught in the dilemma that any effort he makes to satisfy radicals causes centrist voters to flee to the CR, and any effort he makes to satisfy centrists moves radicals further to the left or persuades them not to vote at all.

COMMENT

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¶7. (C/NF) COMMENT: As a National Alliance (AN) member of the Chamber Foreign Relations Committee recently told Poloff, U.S. military basing has always been an "exposed nerve" for radical leftists/pacifists in Italy. The government's mismanagement of the issue politically has sparked profound dissatisfaction among pacifist voters and placed leaders of the radical left parties in the position of finding themselves out of sync with their voting base. In short, radical voters might be even more radical than the parties they voted for in April 2006. If that is indeed the case, RC, PdCI and the Greens will likely become increasingly intransigent in negotiations with CL reformists on security issues of critical importance to the United States, like Afghanistan. END COMMENT.

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